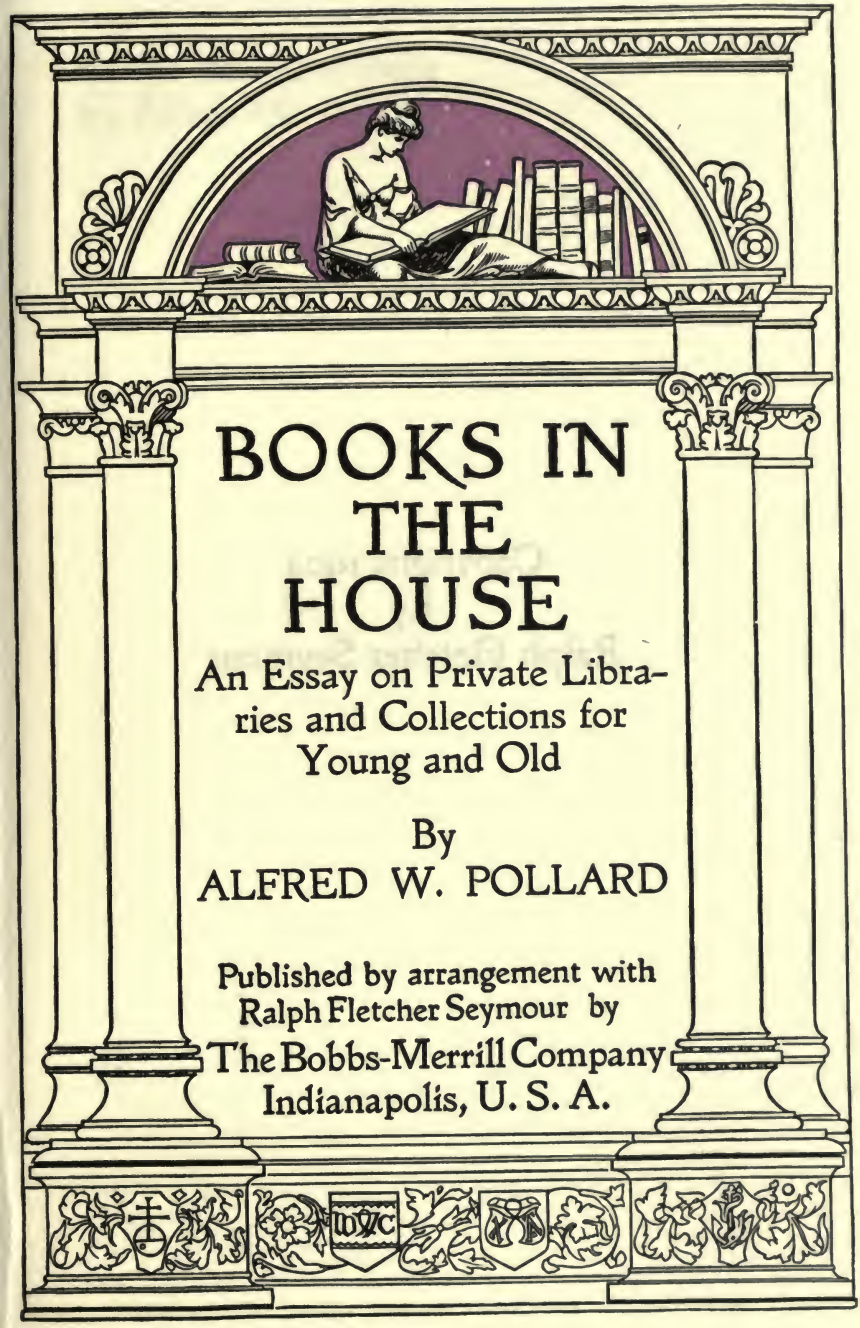
BOOKS IN THE HOUSE



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BOOKS IN THE HOUSE

An Essay on Private Libraries and Collections for Young and Old

By
ALFRED W. POLLARD

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BOOKS IN THE HOUSE

I. THE BUYING OF BOOKS

THERE is one sentence, and as far as I remember only one, in all Ruskin's writings which comes nigh to setting my teeth on edge whenever I read it—the sentence in Sesame and Lilies, in which he asks, with reference to books, "Will you go and gossip with your housemaid or your stable-boy when you may talk with queens and kings?" It is not merely that the implied slur on the stable-boy, who may be a very instructive person to talk to, is a little ungenerous, nor even that of all the great writers of whom I can think there is none, save, perhaps, those sturdy republicans Milton and Landor, to

whose style the epithet royal seems at all fitting, my quarrel with the metaphor is that to talk with kings and queens implies, at least to the imagination, some sense of aloofness and constraint, even of embarrassment, and that to conjure up this picture before the eyes of a timid reader is no good service. Books may be brothers and sisters to us, even fathers and mothers; they may be as schoolmasters and priests, as bachelor uncles, or the golden-mouthed traveller to whom we listen at an inn —but always, if they are to be of any use, they must be as living friends or acquaintances, and the whole art of forming and keeping a library consists in treating them on this footing, alike mentally and materially.

It is true that to acquire a new book is not so serious a venture as to seek a new friend. It would be a serious venture, indeed, to say that in buying a book we take on ourselves no responsibilities. On the contrary, we thereby enter into a covenant with all the gods and goddesses of literature, that so long as that book is in our possession it shall be decently used. But save for this, and for what help we can give literature by a wise choice, the responsibility is mainly to ourselves, and we can indulge in the luxury of being self-regarding.

If we outgrow the book it will not be mortified. If we find we have made a mistake we have but lost our money, though if we allow a bad failure to remain on our shelves, it may sensibly lessen the pleasure we take in a whole bookcase. Yet the ideal of our relations with books remains unaltered, even though the acquisition of a bad book of reference is a less misfortune than the hiring of a bad cook, though an ill-considered treatise on history is more easily changed than an inefficient professor, and though the novel or poem which was to have given us a new philosophy of life proves easier to shake off than the clever table d'hôte talker when his epigrams have begun to pall. Mistakes we must surely make, but we do not want to make more than we need, lest we grow discouraged; while worse than almost any mistake is the failure to rise to the conception of the possibilities which living friendships with books may hold for us.

To spend even a few pounds a year on books is indeed so great a luxury that to forego it when the money can honestly be spared suggests the existence of asceticism in quarters where it might least be expected. But like other luxuries of refinement, book-buying, to be thoroughly enjoyed, needs not only money,

but some little leisure. To buy a book in a hurry halves the pleasure of the purchase. To buy books by the yard reduces the value to that of the decorative effect of their backs as a substitute for wall-paper. And yet the temptations to buy books by the yard are now very great. As the deacon in Salem Chapel (if any one now knows that delightful book) extolled the attractiveness of a "coorse" above that of the single sermon, so the modern publisher believes in the superior selling-power of the "series" over that of the single book, however good. There are many publishers nowadays, and to too many of them the manufacture of books is as mechanical a business as the production of any other article of merchandise. Like sheep they follow in each other's tracks, and if one firm's "cheap line" in books on sport, or art, or short biographies, or popular reprints, seems to be selling well, straightway half a dozen others flood the market with similar wares, trying to give, or to appear to give, just a little more for the same money, or to charge just a little less for the same amount. Not to be able to "list" a series on every subject on which any other publisher has produced one would seem to argue inferiority; and so our new manufacturers compete with each

other merrily, and the man or woman who can get up a subject quickly, and has a knack for pleasant writing, is more in request than ever before. No doubt from this not too scrupulous competition some good books emerge. Not every contributor to a series writes mainly for the sake of his "pound a thousand." There are always one or two conspicuously better than the rest, and it is the business of the book-buyer to find which these are, and to resist the temptation to fill his shelves with long rows of books all in the same jackets. If he is of my way of thinking he will resist this temptation also when it comes to him in the form of the "Collected Edition," which lately has had so much vogue. Just before his death Robert Louis Stevenson needed money for his Samoan estate, and an ingenious friend raised it for him most successfully by persuading all the different firms who had published his books to allow them to be printed uniformly, in numerous volumes, in large type, at a price which yielded a handsome profit to all concerned. Ere the issue was completed came Stevenson's death, and with it a wave of enthusiasm, which sent the collected edition to a considerable premium, and thus started a fashion in such things. That

it gained money for "R. L. S." covers many sins, and I know good Stevensonians who subscribed gladly for these stately and monotonous volumes. But not in such as these was it that I first read Virginibus Puerisque, The Travels in the Cevennes, and The Inland Voyage; and the grandeur and uniformity with which they are invested deprives them of half their flavour and all their friendliness. It is like calling on an old college crony, and after being handed on from flunky to flunky, finding him in a gilded drawing-room, surrounded by an admiring crowd. We might feel assured that the man himself was unaltered, but it would be odd if we gained the pleasure we had anticipated from our chat. To buy a collected edition of a favourite author is to sacrifice so many sovereigns and so many inches of shelving merely to advertise our allegiance. Haply, we may find in it some minor works hitherto unread, but to expect from it a happy renewal of old intimacies is vain indeed.

I have no love for railing, and will forego an intended tirade against the sumptuous "art" books, with whose splendours those who lightly grow rich beguile themselves at Christmas-time. As the collected edition sometimes justifies itself by putting money into the poc-

kets of authors whose early work was scantily paid, so these barbaric volumes occasionally enable a real student to find a publisher for a monograph which would otherwise go unwritten. The student may feel rather sadly that his cherished theories will never here meet the eyes of the readers whom he would like to convert, and Charles Lamb would certainly have classed these editions among his books that are no books, but we need not quarrel with them too fiercely for all that. It is a pleasanter task to remind those who set apart a few pounds a year for book-buying how much they may do to encourage good literature of their own day. To buy the first editions of modern authors after they have made their reputations is an agreeable by-way of book-collecting. To have bought them when the reputations were still to make would have given us a share, however small, in the delight of their success. To be on the lookout for new authors and buy their early books may load our shelves with some promises which will never be fulfilled, but unless our judgment be very faulty, in some of our purchases we shall anticipate the popular verdict, and even a few hits may console us for some wasted silver. In the matter of praise, young writers nowa-

days receive almost too much encouragement. The much-maligned reviewer is always on the watch for the appearance of a new genius, and eager to proclaim his discovery of it. But the young writer needs patrons who, as Herrick sang of Endymion Porter, will "not only praise, but pay them, too," and it is extraordinary how few of these patrons there be, even when the patronage desired is no more than the expenditure of a five-shilling piece or less. Men whose names are well known to all literary people, and gossip about whom good newspapers are glad to insert, often receive less than a ten-pound note in royalties on a new book, and it is small wonder if so many of them pass over from the ranks of literature to those of journalism. That many of them should so pass is, no doubt, well. Good journalists are better than second or third rate men of letters. But it is not by any means certain that it is always the third-rate men who go. We upbraid Irishmen sometimes for their lack of energy, their disinclination to help themselves, whereas we should rather wonder that, when for so many generations the bravest and most adventurous have sought their fortunes abroad, so much virtue has still remained in the stock. And from the Green Island of literature it is not the

dreamers who can never realise their dreams, nor the polishers of cherry-stones that go forth each year to the New World of newspapers, it is the men who can at least write clearly and have something to say, and it is deplorable that the difficulty of earning from literature an income on which a family can be maintained is so extreme that many promising writers abandon the attempt altogether, or regard their occasional attempts to write a good book as a luxury for which their children's education has to suffer. If readers were more adventurous and less niggardly we might hope for better things. There is no question here of confining ourselves to what Ruskin called the "talk of kings and queens," or substituting at one effort Marius the Epicurean for The Manxman. But we enjoy any game of skill most thoroughly when our playmate is strong enough to put us on our mettle, and surely in the noble game of literature we should match ourselves, not with the authors whose plane of thought is no higher than our own, but with those who carry us at least a few yards nearer to the top of the hill.

If by buying a few good books each year we may help to make literature a more possible profession, we may use our shillings also to

improve the externals of book-production. Book-buyers who do not confine their purchases entirely to the fortnight before Christmas soon get on friendly terms with their book-sellers, and a refusal to buy a book on the ground that the type is bad or badly printed, or the paper unpleasantly heavy or brittle, will very quickly be reported to the offending publisher's traveller, and conveyed by him to headquarters. The types used in British and American books of the day are, mostly at least, fairly good, but the press-work is often far from satisfactory; and more especially when a book has achieved an unexpected success publishers are tempted to have a cast made from the type after one or more editions have been printed from it, and the later editions printed from this cast present an appearance against which a book-buyer has a right to protest. As for modern paper, between the desire for cheapness and the need of an absolutely smooth surface for printing some of the process blocks used for the illustrations with which many books are now foolishly overcrowded, it is in a bad way. As good paper is now made as at any previous time, and if it is sufficiently heavily rolled it can take a surface from which any block can be printed;

but wood-pulp and esparto grass are much cheaper than rags, and the smooth surface more cheaply obtained by loading the mixture with clay than by rolling, hence the multitude of books too heavy to be held in the hand, which it is dangerous to read in bright sunlight, lest the paper turn brown, or whose leaves are so brittle that they can never be properly sewn for binding. Against these evils book-buyers can exercise a perfectly legitimate influence; and they might even help to bring about a revival of the now almost lost art of wood-engraving, if they would but express a little weariness of the meretricious brilliancies of the process block.

But the books and reprints of to-day are not the only ones to be considered when once we begin book-buying. To acquire the very first editions of famous English books needs a long purse, but a library of editions which the authors themselves, or at least their younger friends, might have handled is a much more modest affair, yet from the literary standpoint almost, if not quite, as interesting. Sometimes they are better printed and on better paper than modern reprints; even where they are not so good they bring with them the Old World flavour, and we feel in closer touch with the

authors. In a copy of the second edition of the Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, which I bought the other day for 5s. (its full market value), there are advertisements at the end, of Elia, Carey's Dante, Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, Hyperion, and other poems by John Keats, author of Endymion, Endymion itself, and three books by William Hazlitt. To most of the advertisements contemporary press notices are appended. As it lies before me in its faded pasteboard covers, the book really takes me back to 1823, and gives a sense of nearness to De Quincey and Lamb and Keats and Hazlitt which no modern reprint can inspire. Truly there is joy to be found in the old bookshop, and though dealers' catalogues, to one whose business it is to try to read them all, become a little wearisome, the potentialities of purchase which they offer are very alluring. In buying these old editions book-lovers will do well to think only of their own tastes and means, without attempting to make bargains. If you don't want to read an old book, or if it is not clean and sound enough to be read with pleasure, don't buy it because you have heard of other copies selling at a much higher price. Leave it for the collector, or, better still, for a

fellow book-lover whose tastes lie in this direction. If you think only of what a book is worth to you personally there can be no disappointments, and in the end you will probably find that some bargains have come your way.

In all that has so far been written we have had in view the purchase of books for the buyer's personal pleasure. If the owner of a country house wishes to have a library in it which shall be a pleasure to his visitors as well as to himself, advice is more difficult, and if he has built a new library and placed bookcases all round it, and is in a hurry to fill them, advice is very difficult indeed. Of course he may go to a good bookseller and have his shelves filled for him—by the yard, as aforesaid—just as he may go to a good furniture-shop and have his drawing-room furnished in any style which happens to be fashionable. But the library which does not reflect its owner's individuality is but a poor thing, while one which is a generous extension of a collection of personal favourites gives a pleasant atmosphere to the whole house. Surely the books should come first, and the bookcases as need arises. Leave spaces round the wall for new bookcases, O library-builder, and take time in filling them. It may be that your desires are

purely altruistic, for it is quite possible to be a good fellow and a good talker and a man of parts, and yet not to get your wit from books, or to care over-much for reading them. In that case think of the friends for whose pleasure you would provide, and ask them to help you in their favourite subjects. Far better is it to seek aid from a friend than from a tradesman. There may be some incongruities in the books thus brought together, but there will be no harm in that, and the library will reflect your individuality through that of your friends. If none of your friends can help, you may then have recourse to the tradesman, or, better still, save your money. For to buy books with the certainty that you have not even a friend who will read them is surely as discourteous to the authors as to ask a musician to play to an audience who will not stop talking to hear him.

II. INHERITED BOOKS AND THEIR VALUES

IF, as was suggested in our last paper, to try to form a library in a hurry leads to disaster, to inherit one ready-made is by no means always a blessing. When the original collector has been a man of some literary taste, or a genuine antiquary, the inheritance is likely to be both valuable and (to a worthy descendant) delightful. But the books which have accumulated in the library of a succession of intelligent country gentlemen, or city merchants, who just read and bought the books which their neighbours were reading and buying, but kept them more carefully, are apt, when critically examined, to present a sadly forlorn

appearance, more especially after even a few years of neglect. There will be a general impression of decaying leather and dusty tops, and a first perusal of the book-labels (where they have not fallen off) may reveal nothing more exciting than volumes of the classics with Latin notes, Langhorne's translation of Plutarch, Johnson's Lives of the Poets, Gibbon's Roman Empire, and some sermons. The books occupy the only room in the house which is available for a library; to mix modern ones with them seems incongruous, even if there are spaces on the shelves, and the room looks so dull that no one cares to sit in it. The owner's first impulse may very well be to sell the whole collection as waste paper, but as he looks at the books again he notes that some of them are of dates a good deal earlier than the end of the eighteenth century, and that here and there is a volume printed in old-fashioned types, or, haply, if the owner is an American, bearing local imprints which show that his great-grandfather did not import all his books from England, but encouraged the printer of his own country as well. The idea occurs to him that old books are sometimes valuable, occasionally very valuable indeed, and he wonders if any of these are among

them, and how he is to find out. The bookseller with whom he usually deals is a worthy man, but not patently learned. On the other hand, to ask one of the chief bookselling firms of London, New York, or Chicago, to send an expert to examine a collection which may be all rubbish seems rather absurd, and if the examination is to be with a view to purchase, unsatisfactory, while the owner himself is so ignorant of what he is selling. Moreover, some of the books may have some personal links with former members of his family, and as to the regard to be paid to these, a bookseller's advice is not to the point.

The picture here drawn is by no means imaginary, and human nature being what it is, there is perhaps no great cause for surprise that owners sometimes resort to strange shifts to obtain some expert advice without paying for it. A plan very commonly pursued is to get some not highly educated person to make a list of the books with their dates, and to ask the nearest librarian of a public library, as a part of the work he may reasonably be expected to do, to look through the list and say if any of the books in it are valuable. This is, no doubt, inexpensive, but not entirely satisfactory. The librarian has an uneasy feeling

that he is preventing some bookseller from earning a fee to which he has a right; he is mostly quite sufficiently occupied with his own work, and he has learnt by frequent experience that, should any of the books on the list be desirable acquisitions for his own library, it is practically certain that any other offer will be preferred to his. The owner of a book who asks for gratuitous advice as to its value seems always to think it necessary to represent his inquiry as a mere matter of curiosity, the book being so dear to him that no price would induce him to part with it. The mood is often curiously evanescent, but dignity demands that it should be maintained in the case of the person to whom it is stated, and so the book is sold elsewhere, and the librarian feels annoyed. For this reason members of the staff of many large libraries are strictly forbidden to give any estimate as to the value of books shown to them, nor is the prohibition unreasonable. Even when the owner is unusually frank and confesses to an intention of selling, librarians would far rather that he would take his books in the first instance elsewhere, instead of worrying them into making an offer and using this as a lever to extort more from the trade to whom a libra-

rian's willingness to give a hundred dollars for a book is often a certificate which prompts a sporting offer of a hundred and five.

After all, if books that have long been harboured in a house are to be sold away from it, piety demands that they should first pass beneath their owner's eye, nor need the process be very lengthy or unpleasant. An indispensable preliminary is that the books should be dusted, and if they are very dirty it is well to do this in the open air. Their fate will also be much more favourably considered if before the inspection the parched leather of their bindings is lightly rubbed with ordinary furniture polish, and then quickly dried with a clean rag, or old silk handkerchief. By this simple process dirt which seemed ingrained is removed, and the old bindings not only recover much of their brilliancy, but are given a new lease of life.

When the books come up for inspection the owner will not find it difficult to get a rough idea of their value if he keep one or two general principles in mind. The first of these is that (despite the existence of the word bibliomania, and the fact that room has always been found for book-buyers in the Ship of Fools) folly and book-buying do not generally go together. Sebastian Brant's Book-Fool was

the man, not who wasted good money on worthless books, but who could not, or would not, read the good books he bought. In this sense there are plenty of book-fools still among us; but though the price of a rare book may occasionally be driven up to some monstrous sum by the competition of two millionaires, book prices as a rule are determined by quite reasonable and obvious causes. Of these mere rarity, though under certain circumstances it plays a very important part, is not one of the most immediate. It would be an interesting question, indeed, to determine whether dull books are more likely, or less, to be preserved than good or lively ones. They run no risk of being thumbed to pieces, but it is to no man's interest to preserve them, and perhaps the one consideration balances the other. Whether it is so or not will never be known, for in the case of really dull books no one is tempted to ascertain whether they are rare or not. Could it be proved beyond dispute that every other copy had perished, the solitary survivor of a whole edition might still remain unsalable. Even books which, far from being dull, but which on the contrary possess many points of interest, both historical and literary, have their value only slightly enhanced by

rarity unless they are of a kind which sorts with the fashion of the day among collectors. An extraordinary instance of this may be found in the fact that a well-known London bookseller, Mr. Wilfrid Voynick, has for over a year been offering for $20,000 a collection of over one hundred and sixty books of editions of early date, of not one of which has any one else produced another copy. The books are not only unique (so far as the word can ever safely be used), but interesting in all sorts of ways, so that the possession of them would add distinction to any library in the world. Yet apparently in the eyes of the bookmen who are rich enough to back their opinion their extreme rarity does not bring up their selling value to $125 apiece. Age, again, is a much less potent factor in price than is usually believed. As regards English books, it can hardly be said to exercise much influence after 1640, or on a generous estimate twenty years later, the date of the Restoration. Possibly the publication of Mr. Arber's reprint of the Term-Catalogues may bring down the limit to the end of the seventeenth century. At present it is fixed by the fact that the British Museum, the Cambridge University Library, and the John Ryland's Library have all published

catalogues of English books printed before 1641. As soon as an idea is formed of a collection of all the known books of the period, it becomes interesting to add to this, and hence the dull book printed in 1620 has a distinctly higher value than the equally dull book printed fifty years later. The value, though higher, is not high. If clean and in good condition, an English book printed before 1641 would hardly be marked in any dealer's catalogue at less than five shillings, and this may be taken to be the value conferred by three centuries of antiquity, without any other advantage. When we get back to the sixteenth century the merit of mere age is reinforced by the fact that, for every score of years we recede, we get into a distinctly more interesting period of English printing, so that, taking the value of the dullest conceivable book of 1610 as five shillings, this might fairly be doubled for each twenty years we recede. I do not think any bookseller would ask less than ten shillings for an English book printed in 1590, or than a pound for one of 1570, or the corresponding prices of 2l., 4l., 8l., for books of 1550, 1530, 1510. When we work back to the fifteenth century the rise in value is very marked and rapid. Hardly any English fifteener would fetch less than a

hundred pounds, and there are very few which would fetch so little. Printers abroad having begun earlier, and been far more prolific than those who worked in England, the dullest foreign books will only fetch about the same prices as English ones of some thirty years later. As for books printed in America, it would be rash for an Englishman to attempt to offer a similarly precise rule of thumb, and it may be doubted indeed whether the materials for it yet exist. Some day, perchance, it will enter into the mind of an American bibliographer to produce a catalogue similar to the British ones for the period 1476-1640, just mentioned. Whether such a list of "Books printed in the United States of America and books by American authors printed in England" will take as its limit date the Declaration of Independence or the end of the eighteenth century, or even some still later year, remains to be seen, but it may safely be foretold that five years after that catalogue is published the dullest books printed in the last decade it covers will be worth from fifty cents to a dollar, and that it will be easy from this starting-point to move back constantly increasing values as I have ventured to do in the case of English books.

So much for the unaided, or nearly unaided, influences of age and rarity, the two qualities for which it is commonly believed that collectors are ready to pay most highly. Of the existence of the three other cardinal elements in book values—artistic interest, literary interest, historical interest—the possession of an average amount of cultivation ought to enable the chance possessor of a book to form some idea, not indeed as to how much a book is worth, but as to whether it is worth anything at all. A handsome piece of printing is worth buying at any time. It is natural (though not always wise) to prefer illustrated books to unillustrated ones, and those with borders, initials, or other embellishments to those without them. All these things are elements in price. The market value of literary interest need hardly be dwelt on. An interesting book, as was suggested in our last article, becomes more interesting when read in an edition of the author's own date, and first editions of famous works are always prized. There is an interest in subjects, moreover, as well as in authors and literary form. In an essay which is to appear at Chicago it is hardly necessary to say that all early volumes of travel, or descriptions of the world, which contain references to America,

fetch fancy prices. Books on sports and pastimes, on manners and occupations, more especially when they relate to our creature comforts, as in the case of cookery-books, are at one end of the scale, and it is to be feared that old books on theology, unless by famous authors, occupy the other. On the other hand, all prae-Reformation service-books and Bibles, and Prayer-books printed before the sixteenth century reached its fourth quarter, when in good condition, fetch high prices. The fingers of faithful readers have worn out the majority of copies, and the few that survive in the condition which collectors appreciate are valued accordingly. As we have said already, rarity by itself counts for little, but rarity as a discriminating quality between one desirable book and another has immense influence. The famous Nuremberg Chronicle, with its countless pictures, varies in price, according to condition, from $50 to $200; the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, the most famous of Venetian books, fetches at most only about $600; we hold up our hands in amazement when the 1623 folio of Shakespeare's plays is sold for over $8,500. Considering the intrinsic interest of these three books all these prices are relatively small, because, judged by the usual standards of rarity,

these books are relatively common. When there is only one perfect copy of the 1623 Shakespeare which can come into the market it should fetch $50,000. It is on this question of rarity that expert advice can hardly be dispensed with, though an energetic owner may do much for himself with the aid of some volumes of Mr. Slater's Bookprices Current, or Mr. Luther Livingston's companion work on American Book Prices, in which the prices of all (or most) books which have fetched more than $50 at a London or New York salesroom are recorded year by year. But the simple notes here offered should at least enable the possessor of old books to pick out from his shelves those which have the primary elements of value, and on these any good book-seller will give an opinion at a moderate fee, though he will be found fully able to cope with any of the simple-hearted devices employed to extract that opinion for nothing.

As to what should be sold and what kept, the one sovereign test is that of replaceability. An owner who does not care for eighteenth-century history, or politics, or theology, if the volumes containing them differ in no respect from others in the old bookshops, may well set his shelves free for occupants more to his

taste. To resign one's self to keeping a book permanently without any expectation of being tempted to read it is as little to the world's benefit as the owner's. There should be no mausoleums for books save in the British Museum and the Library of Congress. So long as they are saleable as more than waste paper there must be some one waiting to read them, to whom we are acting dog-in-the-manger. When the waste-paper stage is reached, the book must resign itself to its metempsychosis.

But if a book be not easily replaceable, then there is surely room for second thought ere it be turned out of its home. A valuable book cannot easily be found on the shelves of an old library without being evidence of some ancestor's foresight, literary taste, or as a collector, and to banish this evidence from the family archives seems hard measure. Such books, more especially such as bear marks of ownership, if they are once dispersed, though they be replaced by other copies, will never come back again with the same associations; and they should be parted with as reluctantly as any other heirlooms.





III. THE KEEPING OF BOOKS

LIKE human beings, books have two methods of protection against damp and dirt—their bindings, or clothes, and the book-cases and library buildings, which answer to our houses. The relative importance of these two defences has varied with changing conditions. In modern Europe specially built libraries date from about the end of the fourteenth century. Before that time cupboards in the stone walls of cloisters housed the majority of books, and even when they were in use, in the hands of monks sitting at their cloister "carrills," or in the draughty rooms of private houses, they must have been exposed to many vicissitudes of damp and heat and cold. Hence most early

bindings that have come down to us are notably substantial. Metal bindings, it is true, were used chiefly, if not exclusively, for large service-books in the possession of rich churches. But the earliest leather bindings and half-bindings have mostly wooden sides, and when wood was superseded by pasteboard the sides were still made thick and strong. Further to protect their contents, it was usual for bindings to have clasps or ties, and in Italy these were often placed not only across the fore-edge, but at the top and bottom as well. Thus tightly clasped, the thick paper or vellum of old books was safe against most accidents; and when it is remembered that precious volumes were often carried in a satchel, or case, for additional protection, there is nothing incredible in the stories of books having been dropped in the sea, like the Lindisfarne Gospels, or in a river, as with Queen Margaret's Gospels, without suffering any more serious damage than a stain near the edges. Since the fourteenth century the binding of books has been continually getting lighter, until we have reached the "leatherette," or whatever the material is called, which clothes the modern "pocket edition," but would certainly not clothe it

for long were pocket editions ever carried in the pocket.

Despite the tendency to lightness, good bindings remain the best protection a book can have, and a few words may be said as to their use and abuse. Perhaps the first warning to be given is that bindings are expensive, and that in more ways than one. One of the charms of a binding is that it is the most obvious means of imposing on a book its owner's individuality, of making his copy differ from every other copy. This, however, tells both ways. If the new jacket which we give to a book only marks our own bad taste, or that of the jobbing bookbinder we employ, the result will naturally be unsatisfactory, more particularly if we have allowed the jobbing binder to shave the margins and thus ruin the appearance of the book and also its market value. The most extreme instance of this cropping I know of is that of a copy of Blake's Songs of Innocence, in the possession of Mr. Locker-Lampson, of which he plaintively recorded that a previous owner had cut it down to fit into the cover of an old washing-book; but, in a less degree, the mischief is continually going on. Why binders should be so fond of cropping is hard to see, but in intrusting any

but the very best firms with a book, it is advisable to give specific directions that the margins are not to be cut at all, or to exactly what dimensions they are to be reduced. In the case of a book of any value it is also advisable to give express directions that it is to be properly sewn, and that its back and its head-band are to be a real back and a real head-band, and not shams. In most trade-bindings the leather back plays a purely ornamental part, and the little ridges which run across it are only make-believe. The true back in these books is a piece of brown paper, and the cords or tapes over which the sewing-threads are twisted, instead of standing out to justify the ridges, are sunk in little trenches sawn in the back of the sheets of the book, much to their detriment. These "hollow-backs," as they are called, were introduced because of the difficulty of making a book printed on stiff paper open easily if properly backed, but a book on bad paper is not worth a pretty binding, and to bind a good book thus is an insult. All the strain in opening and shutting is thrown on the joints, with the result, in a book which is much used, that the back comes off bodily. Sham—that is, glued on—head-bands are equally objectionable, because when a shelf

is full a book can only be pulled from its place by the head-band, and if this is not properly sewn it comes off, the leather of the back has to be used instead, and this in its turn speedily gets torn away. My pleasure in the possession of the bound volumes of the Oxford English Dictionary is largely spoilt by the straits to which I am reduced every time I use them. These large books have hollow backs, and there is therefore no means of pulling them out from the shelf without risk of tearing off the leather. The only way to get at them is by clearing away the books on each side so as to be able to take them by the middle, though even this involves some risk. Volumes as heavy as these really require straps which can be used as handles, a device largely employed at the British Museum in the case of bound volumes of the Times and other newspapers.

When he has seen that his books have real backs and real head-bands, the book-lover's troubles in the matter of binding are still not at an end. During the last sixty years the old slow processes of tanning leathers have been quickened by the use of sulphuric acid, and various mineral dyes are employed to give brilliancy to the colours of the leathers used

in binding. As long as the leathers are fresh and moist the sulphuric acid is held in solution, but in quite a few years' time the moisture is dried up, and the acid causes the leather to crumble away. The calf bindings of the sixteenth century have lasted wonderfully, but all modern calf is quite useless for permanent binding, and morocco and pigskin are the only leathers now obtainable which possess any durability. Brilliant colours, even in these, should be avoided, and not all of the plain browns and reds are above suspicion. Fortunately, since a committee of the Society of Arts "on Leather used for Bookbinding" issued its very useful report (obtainable at the society's rooms, John-street, Adelphi, for a shilling) the tanners have been aroused to the dangers of the situation, and good binders in their turn are making much more serious inquiry than of yore into the quality of the leathers they use. But inasmuch as a large class of buyers still prefer the unsound but showy colours, it is advisable that the book-lover who values durability should make his wishes very clearly understood. As already mentioned in a previous chapter, old bindings may be cleaned and started on a new life by the moisture in them being renewed with a dressing of furniture-

polish, lightly applied and quickly wiped clean. The ideal dressing has not yet been discovered, but any polish which does not dry quickly is likely to be at least a palliative.

From the evils which have been described most book-buyers are preserved by the masterly inactivity which leads them to ignore the binder's art altogether. The policy is unenterprising, and discourages the followers of a very beautiful and useful art, but it must be owned that the publishers' "cases," with which so many people are content, are often charmingly pretty, and that those in cloth or in good buckram (cheap buckram soon wears threadbare) possess a very fair degree of durability. Fancy bindings in white paper or parchment, or any other easily soiled material, are very alluring when the shopman takes off their grey paper covers and shows them as they come fresh from the binder's; but unless the paper covers are always to be kept on, which would be absurd, they require to be housed and handled with so much care that they bring with them more anxiety than joy. If I may go back for one moment to leather bindings, I would say that we must beware of the same danger in these also. A binding so dainty that it cannot be stood on a shelf without the

protection of a slip-case or box may well excite the kind of contempt which Hamlet felt for Osric, or which any man who recognises that there is work to do in the world feels for a mere fop. A binding should protect its book, and should not itself need protection. The best French and Italian bindings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have gained in charm when they have been freely handled by careful owners, and ornament so elaborate or so delicate that it cannot stand this is quite misplaced. Nor should ornament ever be so profuse as to cover too large a proportion of the leather, for the texture of a really good piece of leather is so charming in itself that it needs little further decoration. When the leather is bad, or doubtfully leather at all, as in some recent imitations of old bindings, profuse gilding is a merit, since it helps the deception. But with these imitation bindings, which vulgarise and degrade old masterpieces, no true lover of books is likely to concern himself.

We must turn now from the clothes of books to their dwelling-rooms, though practically all there is to say on this subject may be summed up in the sentence that in matters of light, temperature, and ventilation, what is

best for their owner will mostly be best for the books. Enough light to keep the air sweet and clean, enough ventilation to avoid damp or the dryness of artificially heated rooms, and a temperature which does not rise or fall too suddenly, these are all requisites in a pleasant living-room, and they are all necessary for the proper housing of books. In asking for light it must be remembered that books, like most human beings, though they like sunlight, like it diffused and not directly in their eyes. Cloth cases and leather bindings on which the sun is allowed to shine for even a few hours a day rapidly fade, and the leather is thought not only to fade but to rot as well, as if (though I do not myself believe this) the actinic rays were directly injurious to it. In the year 1903, in which this essay is being written, this danger may, of course, be disregarded, and it is more to the point to consider whether, as a precaution against floods, all libraries should not be housed on the first floor. But under normal conditions, even in England, very serious mischief may be done by direct sunlight, and I know of one library, formerly noted for its fine bindings, in which the reds have been reduced to yellows and the browns to greys, with patches of their origi-

nal colours remaining, where some bar had shielded the leather, as witnesses of the havoc the sun has wrought. This is a narrow room lit by windows in a gallery, through which the sun could pour down at ten and eleven in the morning, when nearly at its greatest intensity. Such an arrangement is not likely to be found in many houses, but it suggests that broad, low windows are better in libraries than high ones, and that where high ones are a necessity, it may be well (in order to avoid daily manipulation of blinds) to use for the upper panes pale green or yellow glass, which lessens the force of the sun's rays. It may be gathered also that a south aspect is better for a library than a west one, as even through quite low windows the afternoon sun will shine directly onto the books ranged on the opposite wall.

Heat, especially when accentuated by impurity in the air caused by much tobacco smoke, or by that now disappearing enemy, gas, is very destructive to leather-bound books. For this reason, as well as for convenience, bookcases should not be much more than eight feet high, as the air of a room is always hottest near the ceiling. In the days of adventurous youth I used to enjoy to the full the delights of "open access" at that be-

neficent institution with which the foresight of Thomas Carlyle endowed English literary folk, the London Library (before it was rebuilt), by climbing the long ladders, meant only for the staff, and roking among the top shelves. The heat at those top shelves and the foulness of the air were indescribable, and the old bindings certainly showed the effect of these conditions. The ugliest of book-stacks is better than shelving carried to the top of a lofty room.

Excessive sunlight and heat are injurious chiefly to bindings, damp on the other hand is destructive to the books themselves as well as to their jackets, foxing the plates and depriving the paper of the size which keeps it hard and strong. Damp is also a more subtle enemy since it more often attacks from behind than frontally, and glazing may only accentuate the harm. If books smell musty when the glass doors are opened it is time to make sure that damp is not coming through the wall. At all times it is important to see that a glazed bookcase is adequately ventilated. Otherwise, when the temperature falls, moisture collects on the inner side of the glass, and this may be quite sufficient to do harm.

As to the advantages and disadvantages of glass fronts much might be written. They are almost a necessity when valuable books have to be housed, merely as a signal to ignorant persons that they really are valuable. But precisely because glass has this deterrent effect, it destroys the homeliness and friendliness of a library, and in the country, where dirt is so much less poisonous than in large cities, it should be dispensed with as much as possible. Of course, if a country house has a library chimney which smokes, then glass is as needful as in London, Manchester, or any English or American manufacturing town, but a library chimney ought not to be allowed to smoke. Ordinary dry country dust, unless books are allowed to stand gaping on the shelves, does very little harm. Still, it is well to have no more of it than is unavoidable, and the library floor should never be carpeted all over, but should be polished and covered, where necessary, with rugs that can be taken away and cleaned and put down again without any dust being sent flying all over the room.

As regards bookshelves, the most important recommendation that can be made is that they should be easily adjustable to any sizes of books they may have to hold. No matter

how carefully dimensions are calculated, fixed shelves are a constant source of annoyance, and nothing looks uglier than a bookcase in which rows of small books are standing on shelves much too tall for them, while elsewhere large volumes are laid on their sides or their fore edges because they have not space to stand upright. Where the books fit well with the height of the shelves allotted to them there is no need to use "falls," which often get torn, and in the case of small books sometimes hide the lettering. In place of falls some careful owners lay strips of brown paper or cloth along the tops of their books, which can be taken off and cleaned as often as necessary. They certainly save the tops of the books from dust, but if they are to look tidy either the top level of the books must be uniform all along the shelf, or else the cloth must be weighted with shot so as to follow the level of the books and keep its position. It need hardly be said that the shelves of a bookcase should never be either painted or varnished, as it is impossible to prevent a book which is at all heavy, or which stands for any time in the same place, from sticking to the shelf if the shelf offers it the smallest encouragement to do so.

Lastly, the best means of keeping a book is to read it. Mr. Locker-Lampson, who first introduced me to the charm of old books, used to tell a story of how, for some small imperfection, he once took back a rare book to a famous binder, and how the old man examined the faulty cover, and then, looking at the complainant over his spectacles, exclaimed reproachfully, "Why, Mr. Locker, you've been reading it!" It was a good story, but not to the old binder's credit, for careful use is as good for a book as moderate exercise for a man's body. To be held in a healthy human hand will postpone the need of furniture polish, the dust is flicked off, the damp dispelled, and every book on the shelf is the better for the slight stir caused if only a single volume is taken out and replaced. Only it must be remembered that the most forgiving book will reap but little profit from its jaunt if it be held in front of the fire, laid down on its face in order that the reader's "place" may not be lost, dog-eared with the same intent, devoured in conjunction with buttered toast, or submitted to the last and worst indignity of having its leaves turned with a wetted finger. This trick is so disgusting that an apology seems required for even mentioning it, but one who watches

many readers knows that, though dying out, it is not yet extinct, and that more especially it clings to the man who has risen in the world, when every other trace of a bad education has been overcome. All such disrespectful tricks should be cured early. We sometimes treat books too superstitiously, as if the words of a silly person became any wiser by a printer's time having been wasted over them. But the worst and most foolish of books does share so far in the divinity of the noblest that, until the day comes for it to be pulped, its outward form should be held sacred.

IV. ON THE FUNCTIONS OF THE COLLECTOR

IN an earlier chapter we have incidentally vindicated book-collectors from the charge of folly which the existence of the silly word "bibliomania," and misunderstanding of Sebastian Brant's meaning in his Narrenschiff, have caused to be brought against them. Incidentally, also, we have looked at the effects of age, rarity, and some other causes on the prices of old books. But up to this point we have been concerned exclusively with the book-buyer who buys to read, and our excursions into the theory of collecting have been caused only by our having to consider the case of the reader of modern literature who finds himself pos-

sessed of a library of old books which he does not know what to do with. It seems worth while now to devote a few pages to a talk about collecting, which in itself is quite a different thing from the formation of a library, though it is from this that it has developed. That the development is a natural one may be argued from the fact that it has occurred more than once. There were collectors very much of the modern kind in the days of the Roman Empire, men who prided themselves not so much on the number of their books as on their beauty and fine condition. Despite the fact that he loved "plenty," this, indeed, was the attitude of Sebastian Brant's book-fool, though his folly consisted, not in the fact that he collected, but in his confession, "What they mean do I not understand." "But yet," he says—

"But yet I have them in great reverence
And honour, saving them from filth and ordure,
By often brushing and much diligence.
Full goodly bound, in pleasant coverture
Of damask, satin, or else of velvet pure,
I keep them sure, fearing they should be lost
For in them is the cunning wherein I me boast.

But if it fortune that any learned men
Within my house fall to disputation,
I draw the curtains to show my bookes then
That they of my cunning should make probation;
I keepe not to fall in altercation;
And while they commune, my books I turn and wind,
For all is in them, and nothing in my mind."

In this second stanza we have in the best verse that Alexander Barclay, Brant's translator, could write, the common gibe of scholars at the rich man who buys books which they would like themselves, but cannot afford. Let it be granted that the gibe is not unnatural. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it was very natural indeed. Despite the invention of printing, books were still scarce and expensive, and one great scholar, Isaac Casaubon, is even said to have taken to himself a wife in order to obtain access to his father-in-law's library, a manoeuvre which met with no more success than it deserved. Even to-day the grievance of the poor student is not quite extinct. I have been trying myself for several years to obtain any kind of a copy, no matter how imperfect, of the 1598

edition of Sidney's Arcadia. But they are all in collector's libraries, save a few in public ownership, and not even a large fragment is obtainable. Nevertheless on any fair balance the debt of the literary student to the antiquarian collector is beyond all calculation. But for him, for his extravagance in buying and care in keeping, whole sections of literature would have gone out of existence altogether, or have been preserved in a more imperfect and mutilated form than is the case. Students of literature, and still more perhaps the professors of it, being human, are as subject to the influence of fashion and taste as the most casual subscribers to a circulating-library, and though in our own day we may well imagine that there is no period of literature whose least worthy products some one will not be ready to admire and exalt, it yet remains probable that our eyes are still shut to some beauties which our successors will be able to perceive if only Time be not allowed to sweep the books away ere the generation which can admire them is born. It is in thus resisting the ravages of Time, in gleaning where he seems to have done his worst, that the collector justifies his existence, and in our light-hearted talk of literary immortality we often forget

how largely this immortality depends on the good will of antiquarian collectors.

Perhaps the arrogance of the literary critic was never more strikingly exemplified than in a remark of the late Mr. H. D. Traill in one of the early numbers of "Literature," a weekly paper begun with much flourishing of trumpets, but which, despite Mr. Traill's possession of most of the gifts of a literary editor, never thrived. There had been talk, with only too much reason, of the badness of modern paper, and Mr. Traill, in impulsive contradiction, lamented that any paper should be made which could last more than a century. If during a hundred years no one cared to reprint a book, it was clearly not wanted, and that libraries, public or private, should be blocked with unread books was purely a misfortune.

So in the mood of the moment wrote Mr. Traill who could well afford to make a mistake, and the mistake was indeed worth making, because of the curious results of an examination into how his rule would have worked had it been made retrospective. Of the poets who died before Charles I. was king, I think only Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare would have survived. All the rest would have succumbed during the century and a half of in-

difference and neglect which separates Herrick's Hesperides and Noble Numbers from the Lyrical Ballads of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Herrick himself reappeared in 1825. Surrey and Wyatt were edited by Dr. Nott in 1815, Gower's Confessio Amantis by Pauli in 1857. Sidney's Astrophel and Stella was brought to life with his other shorter works in 1829. His Arcadia, which retained its popularity for a century and a half, has not been reprinted in its entirety since 1739, though an abridgment was published by Hain Friswell in 1867, and a fac-simile of the incomplete first edition was edited by Dr. H. Oskar Sommer a few years ago. The length of the Arcadia, of course, has stood in its way, and it is only recently that modern publishers have plucked up heart to attack some of the longer masterpieces. The translation of Frossart by Lord Berners, which by Mr. Traill's rule would have perished twice over between Middleton's edition in the sixteenth century and the reprint of 1812, would have had another narrow escape, since eighty-nine years elapsed between this last and Professor Ker's edition in 1901. Holinshed has never been reprinted in full since 1587. Hakluyt has fared better, and even Perclas's Pilgrims are now to reappear.

Raleigh's History of the World is not likely to find a new publisher, and even Camden's (though a far more manageable work) has lacked one since 1635. Thanks to Dodsley's Old Plays, etc., Elizabethan dramatists would have survived the application of Mr. Traill's rule in single specimens, but no new collected editions were published till the beginning of the nineteenth century. As to the smaller men, such as Nash, Greene, Lodge, Breton, Churchyard, and many others, though their names are enshrined in histories of literature, had it not been for collectors their works would have perished utterly.

The truth which has been illustrated in this haphazard way for some of the masterpieces of English literature holds equally for those of any other country. We are familiar with the long sleep of the classical Greek writers, and the ravages wrought during it with their works, but we hardly realize, perhaps, how much of Latin literature survived the Middle Ages by the "skin of its teeth." Some authors now neglected were then widely read. Seneca, for instance, and Statius. Others, such as Virgil and Ovid have enjoyed continuous vogue. But Lucretius and Catullus very nearly perished. Much of Livy, we know, has gone, and the

Annals of Tacitus only survived under circumstances which caused the finder of them to be branded as a forger. The list might be much extended, and it is a striking commentary on the narrowness of modern classical scholarship that many minor Greek and Latin authors can still only be obtained in sixteenth-century editions, zeal in reprinting being almost entirely confined to Germany. In so far, then, as the lives of books depend upon the care of the professional guardians of literature, it is evident that they have fared badly in the past, nor can we, despite our modern activity, feel any certainty that they will fare superlatively well in the future. The nineteenth century rediscovered Elizabethan and Jacobean literature, and rejoiced to reprint it, with much wonderment at the neglect into which it had fallen. Possibly, before it has run its course, the twentieth century may rediscover the eighteenth, and reprint its minor poetry with as much self-congratulation as we have felt at the recovery of Campion and the other song-writers of his day. Meanwhile it is the function of the collector, by surveying books from a different standpoint, to lessen the risks of their going out of existence before they have had their second chance. It may be granted that,

if large funds are at their disposal, this function will be performed still better by great libraries. But the modern conception, so excellent in itself, of a library as a literary workshop is not likely to encourage in the future those antiquarian tendencies, which, while often making librarians of the old school churlish to their daily visitors, yet helped them greatly in building up the collections which are now our delight. The librarians of those days were in fact themselves collectors, nor must it be forgotten that it is to the bequests of individual book-hunters that the great historic libraries now owe some of their chief attractions. The Bodleian Library, which, by its founder's wish, paid little attention to the "light literature" of the great period amid which it grew up, and which turned out the Shakespeare Folio of 1623 when it obtained a later edition, would be in a far less enviable position were it not for the splendid bequests of Rawlinson, Tanner, Malone and Donce. Without the privately formed collections of George III. and Thomas Grenville, even the £10,000 a year which the British Museum for half a century had to spend on books would have been unavailing to supply its gaps. The private collector does indeed reach his apotheosis when he thus

gives to the community the results, not only of his expenditure, but of the skill and judgment by which it has been guided. But even if he shows no such liberality, he is still a most useful factor in the preservation of books. For him agents traverse Europe in search of neglected volumes; it is the memories of the high prices he is willing to give that stays the destroyers' hands; it is by his care that soiled, fragile, and torn leaves are cleaned, and sized, and mended. He has committed many crimes in the past. He commits some even at the present day, despite all attempts at guidance. To please his pride, his Dogberry-like determination to have everything handsome about him, countless old bindings have been ripped off to be replaced by new morocco bearing the owner's arms. The inoffensive stains of age have been cleaned away, though ink and paper both suffer in the process. The old arrangements of the sheets are ignored in resewing, and two or more slightly imperfect copies are used to make one, so-called, perfect one, though these made-up copies smell of the hospital, and can give no pleasure to any justly fastidious taste. Yet with all the faults for which collectors can be held responsible, they are a most useful race, the more useful, per-

haps, in proportion as the books they collect are more remote from popular tastes. A librarian who has done splendid service in spreading the "workshop" ideal among his fellows complained the other day that we know more about the books of the fifteenth century, and the printers of them, than about those of our own day. It was a splendid testimonial to the antiquarian zeal of collectors and students of this branch of bibliography. For the ordinary book-buyer to keep books which he never has read and never will read is useless and wasteful. They cumber his shelves and help to give him a distaste for reading altogether. But to have the same books regarded from another standpoint by a collector who can form friendships with them on other grounds, this is a real advantage to the community, and one that excuses many occasional errors and extravagances.

V. HOW TO COLLECT

ANY one who finds himself buying a book, new or old, for any other reason than a desire to read it, will do well to ask himself, as speedily as possible, what aim he has in view. To buy books except for the sake of reading them constitutes the buyer, though by a single instance, a collector, and to collect aimlessly is a mere waste of money, and possibly also of time. Collecting may begin in the humblest and most insidious of ways. If I buy a book, of which I already possess a reasonably good edition, merely because it is prettily printed, I have to confess to myself that I do it because I am tempted to become a collector of specimens of fine printing. As it is a little danger-

ous for literary folk with children to educate to collect anything at all, I try to compromise by getting rid of the less attractive edition every time I buy a prettier one. But this is only a ruse which would not even deceive the lady who shares the educational responsibility aforesaid, did she require deceiving. Her own temptations lie in the not very expensive direction of all the editions of Jane Austen's novels that have ever been printed. This is a rather common form of introduction to book-collecting, and only becomes dangerous when the writer selected began inconveniently early. The late Mr. R. C. Christie, a genuine scholar and collector, had a special fondness for Horace, and brought together over eight hundred different editions. Another book-lover, Mr. Waterton, collected all the editions of the Imitatio Christi which he could acquire, and at the time of his death, if I remember rightly, possessed over thirteen hundred of them. All of these not already on its shelves were purchased by the British Museum, and the fact that the whole of the Museum collection, thus reinforced, passed through my hands during the process of recataloguing did not diminish the distaste I have always felt for this particular form of collecting. In it, as a

rule, the individual books become mere ciphers, interesting not for their own sake, but as proving the comparative popularity of the work in different countries and at different times, and this only in a rough and ready fashion, since the number of editions is a poor guide unless we also know the size of them. In any case, a list of the edition tells the tale as well as, or better than, the books themselves, and the collector's mission sinks to that of providing the raw material for the bibliographer. Where the author of a book has not lived so inconveniently early as S. Thomas a Kempis, or where only editions printed within his century are collected, the task is less burdensome, and more remunerative. Thus Mr. Wise, Mr. Buxton Foreman, Mr. Gosse, and others have done excellent work in bringing to light the stray printing of various English writers of the nineteenth century, though they have also all yielded to the temptation to create artificial rarities by obtaining leave to print various small pieces in private editions, an amusement which recalls some of the special-stamp issues of insignificant governments.

If in this one direction a form of book-collecting which starts from the collector's

own literary tastes may lead to doubtful results, the fact remains that it is by following their own tastes that collectors are most likely to promote the cause of learning and literature. The student possessed of a wide, or even a moderate, knowledge of his own special subject, by turning his attention to the books illustrating the history of its development may do work which no librarian and no bibliographer as such can possibly emulate. The philological works brought together by Prince Lucien Bonaparte, the library of political economy amassed by Professor Foxwell, are two examples that have attracted notice of recent years, of the admirable results attained by this expert collecting of this kind. It is only fair, however, to add that its pecuniary results are exceptionally hazardous. Unless a fund can be raised to buy the collection for presentation to some new institution it is almost impossible to dispose of, even at a sacrifice, without division, and this though it does not really diminish its usefulness, is a sad alternative as seeming to deprive the collector of the legitimate monument of his skill.

On a small scale, and for collectors who will not allow themselves to pay too heavily in the struggle towards the completeness which can

never be attained, subject-collecting is the easiest, the cheapest, and the most obviously rational form the pleasure can take. It is also probably the most popular, as witness the great rise in the prices of old books on gardening, sport, costume, cookery, and other subjects in which interest is widely diffused. The newcomer who wishes to walk along these paths will need a fairly long purse, but the variety of subjects is endless, and there are still plenty in which books may be bought cheaply enough.

When we pass from collecting books for their subjects to collecting them for their outward form we pass into a much more limited hunting-ground, and yet one which has been worked with a curious lack of system. Amateurs of the historical side of printing have, indeed, been systematic enough in searching some small corners of the field, as is testified by the complaint already quoted, that the history of the presses of the fifteenth century is better known than that of those of our own day. But the later history of printing is almost entirely neglected, to the distinct disadvantage of learning, since as long as printers are intermediaries between authors and readers a knowledge of their ways in each generation

may at any moment be of use in deciding literary problems.

On its aesthetic side also the collection of specimens of printing, as such, has been too much confined to very early books. Good work was proportionally more plentiful in the fifteenth century than it has been since, but there was plenty also of bad even in those days, and at least some good in almost every generation from then till now. Mr. R. C. Christie, whose Horace collection I have already mentioned, turned his attention also to the output of the Lyonnese presses of the middle of the sixteenth century, and Owens College, Manchester, has been enriched by a very charming collection as a result of his hobby. It is astonishing to me that no English or American book-lover has set himself to acquire the books printed by the Chiswick Press, which would illustrate the history of nineteenth-century printing at its best, and form a most amusing and interesting series. That any printer or publisher can abstain from seeking representative specimens of fine book-making at different periods seems to me curiously foolish. The experiments of his predecessors must surely be not only of interest, but of commercial value, and his own

possession of some expert knowledge ought to enable him to expend to the best advantage a couple of hundred pounds in acquiring half as many representative specimens. The sum named may seem surprisingly small, but when literary value and rarity are set aside, good printing of itself is not at present excessively priced in the book-market, and bargains may still be made.

When we turn from the printing of books to their illustration we find the same excessive competition for the earliest specimens, in which it must be confessed, though they are my own particular hobby, that the cuts are often more quaint than beautiful. Later work is comparatively neglected, and offers a fine opportunity for a collector blessed with good taste to bring together a charming series of specimens at a cost not exceeding what he might have to pay for even two or three masterpieces of the fifteenth century. The books with illustrations on copper, set in with the text, though of course by a separate impression, which ousted the old woodcuts from popular favor during the second half of the sixteenth century, may be recommended to the judicious purchaser, and good English work of the succeeding century, unless in the form of frontispieces

to literary rarities, does not yet command an excessive price. The French illustrated books of the eighteenth century are much more expensive, since they have long been prized by collectors, who have carried the fashion of extra-illustrating with proof impressions or suppressed plates, to extreme lengths. It must be said, also, that many of these livres a vignettes are more fit for the top shelf or the locked cabinet than for the drawing-room table, and reflect more credit on the skill of the artist than on his sense of decency or that of his employers. The English barons of this period, often illustrated by French artists, are free from this defect, but have less artistic merit, while the custom of "hot-pressing" then prevalent in England has frequently caused "foxing," a calamity easily evaded by the rich collector who can pick his copies, but which produces great disappointment to less wealthy book-hunters. To these copper engravings succeeded the woodcuts and illustrations of the school of Bewick, and then the wonderful steel-plate engravings after designs by Turner and other artists. Collectors who turn their attention to any of these, though they raise prices, will yet confer genuine benefits on the historians of English book-work, since for lack of

eager purchasers it is to be feared that many of the books are going out of existence, and in a short time no proper record of them will be obtainable.

During recent years a steady effort has been made to interest collectors in the books illustrated by English artists in the '60's, but fine as the woodcuts often are in design, and sometimes also in execution, no great success has attended their attempts, because the print, paper, and ornaments by which the pictures are accompanied are so wretchedly poor as to spoil the pleasure a book-lover would naturally take in the pictures themselves.

Books remarkable for excellence in their ornamental borders and initials form another group which invite the attention of judicious collectors. There is a great tendency now to imitate to the point of weariness a few fifteenth-century border-pieces and initial letters to which attention has been drawn. It would be better if our book-artists tried to work with originality on the same lines as the old craftsmen, instead of slavishly copying their work. But if old work is to be imitated, a wider knowledge of it must be desired, and collectors might help this by gathering representative specimens and giving little exhibitions at their clubs.

One special class of initial letter, though by no means to be imitated, cries aloud for a collector on account of its curiosity. About 1540, or perhaps a little earlier, some Venetian publishers began to ornament their books with initials designed on the plan of the rhymes, "A was an Archer who shot at a frog, B was a Butcher who had a great dog," so dear to our childhood. In books on sacred subjects, A might show Abraham sacrificing his son, B Balaam and his ass, C Cain, and so on. These designs are mostly fairly easily explained, though it is sometimes necessary to remember that the forms of scripture names prevalent in Italy in the sixteenth century differ from those with which we are familiar. The mythological sets are much more difficult, and I have often thought of reproducing a dozen of them and offering a prize for the best guesses. The books in which these initials occur are mostly quite cheap, and a collection of them would be very amusing.

Such are some of the forms which collecting might profitably take in the hands of amateurs of the outward form of books, who have sufficient good taste to distinguish good work from bad, or sufficient interest in the history of printing to care to epitomize it in a

collection in which the bad work of each century should be represented as well as the good. Other accidents in the lives of books have sometimes attracted special students. There are those who have collected books that have been condemned by the Inquisition or other censors, books written in prison, books dedicated to famous persons, or books printed (mostly until recent days very badly) at private presses. To enumerate all the possible characteristics which have allured collectors is no part of our task. Practically all collecting is good if it have a definite aim, which leads the collector to rescue books from destruction, and add to knowledge by classifying and cataloguing them. The positive results may not always be great, even relatively; may sometimes seem small indeed; but the joy of the hunt is perennial, and this is the collector's chief reward.

VI. THE CHILD'S BOOKSHELF

AN essay on Books in the home would be very incomplete without a few words on those often ragged, mostly untidy, shelves on which boys and girls, as soon as they have learned to read, begin to place their poor literary treasures. If education means anything, this foot or two of shelving is just the most important thing in the whole house, for on it more than on anything else depends what will be the child's tastes in after life. Yet in this matter parents often show a most strange and culpable indifference. Books, we said at the outset of this little essay, must be our friends. No other relation between us and them (save in the case of mere works of reference) can be per-

manently profitable. Now, when we are grown up the right to choose our own friends is one of the most precious of human prerogatives. But while we are still young if our child's library is to wait until the stream of folly has run dry it may wait long indeed. Taking things as they are, two suggestions may be offered which will perhaps prove useful. In the first place, let donors of books be very slow indeed to put inscriptions in them; and secondly let there be in each house a general children's library, in addition to the bookshelf which each child regards as peculiarly its own. The thread which links these two suggestions is the idea put in the forefront of this article, that any library worthy of the name must be the result of individual choice, and that the exercise of this power of choice cannot be begun too early. Now, to the free exercise of choice, more especially in the case of an affectionate child, inscriptions offer a great obstacle. I have books on my own shelves now which I have never read and never shall read, but which I cannot bear to part with, because they carry on their fly-leaves the names of dearly loved doners who made these mistakes in their Christmas or birthday presents. The books they gave me which I really liked are, alas!

mostly gone, thumbed to pieces with a child's carelessness. Only these indigestible pieces remain, and I would gladly burn them if I could do so reverently. But no one who has not tried to burn a book can have any idea of how difficult a feat it is, and to do it reverently is impossible, except in a crematorium. Our remote forefathers used to burn or bury with the dead the possessions which they had held dear in life. From a different motive I should like these poor relics to perish with me. To expect my children to house them for the reasons that I do would be exacting; but that they should appear in the Fourpenny Box with their inscriptions erased or torn out seems an impiety. Let the book-giver have a thought for these difficulties. "If you like the book very much, a year hence I will write your name in it; if not, do what you like with it." Surely this would be a wise saying. The unfavoured books might remain awhile in the general stock and then be weeded out. If it can be done in honest good will, they should be passed on to other children; if not, there is always the paper-maker to give them a fresh chance of usefulness.

The general library in the nursery or schoolroom should not be confined to these experi-

mental presents. Into it the wise parent will place from time to time, without much comment, plenty of miscellaneous books on which young readers may browse with advantage, and when a book has been read and honestly liked, the reader may well be allowed to appropriate it. In this way and with the survival of the fittest among the gift-books the child's private bookshelf will gradually become tenanted. Yet these two sources of increase may well be supplemented by a third. From among the books read aloud to them by their elders, from those they meet with in the houses of friends, from those recommended by really careful guides with a knowledge of individual tastes and capacities, there must be some which a boy or girl will feel a real desire to buy, and as they reach years of what may be called "minor discretion," at ten, twelve, or fourteen, according to their development, to give the boy or girl a dollar every three months specifically to buy books with, is the best possible educational investment. The choice may be very gently criticised, but it should be left as free as possible, or the value of the experience will be half destroyed.

It is inevitable that our friends should to some extent be chosen for us, or rather that

our power of choice should be limited to selection from among companions presented to us by authority. Unfortunately in the matter of book-friends authority is very lightly assumed and very carelessly exercised. If an uncle or aunt or any other well-meaning person sent boys or girls to play with our children with all the forms of a personal recommendation, but really without taking any trouble to find out what their influence would be likely to be, we should strongly resent it. Yet Christmas after Christmas books are sent to children, with inscriptions expressive of love and affection, the donors having never read a chapter of them, but having chosen them solely on the ground of a taking title or pretty pictures. The mischief thus wrought is really great. We wonder at the force of tradition in schools, and yet what boy goes to school without having had books given him to read in which schoolmasters are treated as his natural enemies, often as "cads" or "sneaks," and the piggishness of the dormitory supper is held up as the height of bliss? Or, again, how much nonsense is put into girls' heads by love-stories with heorines of sixteen, or by weakly religious tales exhibiting a combination of theoretical humility with gross spiritual

self-consciousness, which is only too easily imitated? If donors will not take the trouble to read the books they give away they might minimise their risks by choosing those which other people have read and approved. There are plenty of bad books which reach second editions, but books which appear a second and third year upon the market are not likely to be among the worst, and if anything can be done to lessen the craze for novelty it will be something to the good. George Henty had no small gifts as a story-teller, but to make an income he had to turn out his three books every year, and even then could have made but a poor one had not the boys and girls of America reinforced his English readers. What wonder that his plots became mechanical and his style ragged? Lazy book-buyers have no right to be adventurous. They should leave the newest books to donors who will take some trouble, and who are rich enough, if they find they have made a mistake, to put a bad book in the fire instead of giving it away. It may be said in passing that there would seldom be need to take such a course if reviewers of Christmas books were decently conscientious and courageous enough to exact a reasonably high standard. Here again the

craze for novelty is disastrous. The crowd of new books is so great that a dozen have to be noticed in a column. To read a book of 400 pages carefully enough to give an honest verdict on it, to compress this verdict into ten or twelve lines which have, if possible, to be made amusing, and then to receive three or four shillings as your wage, is very poor business. Yet these are the conditions under which the bulk of Christmas books are reviewed in the very best newspapers, and the fault does not rest with editors, but must be shared between the public and the publishers who both are crazy for novelties.

There remains the material question—given the child's library or bookshelf, where is it to be placed? The answer to this is unluckily rather difficult. If it is in the same room as the general stock, the two are certain to get mixed, and with the invasion of the private shelf by alien volumes all pride and pleasure in it are like to disappear. On the other hand, to books in bedrooms, until the age of measles, mumps, and chicken-pox is passed, there are very strong objections. In some houses a landing outside the bedroom may offer a safe, if rather cold and unindividual, site for a simple bookcase. In other homes a nook may be

found for it in a morning-room, or any place to which the owner may have free access. Only the nook, if in a frequented room, should be as inconspicuous as possible, lest the shelf attract too much attention and a habit of mind be cultivated which might lead to the acquisition of the Best Hundred Books. Where expense forms no great obstacle the glazed single shelves, which can be built up, as more are acquired, into a fairly handsome bookcase, have many advantages. But the housing must never be allowed to be more important than the books, and any ostentation should be quietly discouraged.

With a little care, a little watchfulness, and at the same time a little self-denial on the part of would-be advisers too much inclined to force a child's taste instead of allowing it to develop naturally, the bookshelf thus formed in early days will become the forerunner of many others, and the habit of bookbuying begun under these conditions will probably remain through life. After all, it is a good habit. Even when it becomes unusually pronounced it may coexist, as in the classic case of Arthur Pendennis, with other expensive tastes, but more often it takes the place of them, and the number of people who have ruined themselves

by bookbuying is probably even smaller than that of the few, of whom we sometimes hear too much, who have found it, pecuniarily, a good investment. Nor surely was the need of a love of literature, and all that literature carries with it, ever more urgent than in the present day, when enormous wealth is so lightly acquired, and the man who has the money-making instinct may find himself at middle age possessed of a power compared to which that of the medieval baron, with his private gallows, was but a trifle. In the early days of "Popular Educators" reading was advertised as a panacea against poverty; there is as much need of it nowadays as a guide to the right use of wealth, nor is it possible too early or too earnestly to take thought that a child shall be led to the best culture to which, by natural development, boy or girl can attain.

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